



Grandparent Caregivers Program: Annual Status Report, CY09

January 2010



D.C. Child and Family Services Agency
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Grandparent Caregivers Program

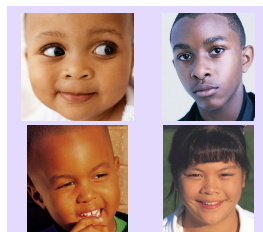
2009
SNAPSHOT



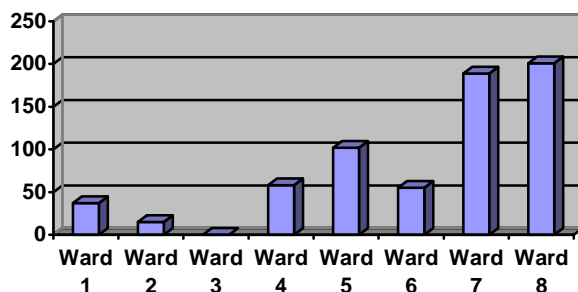
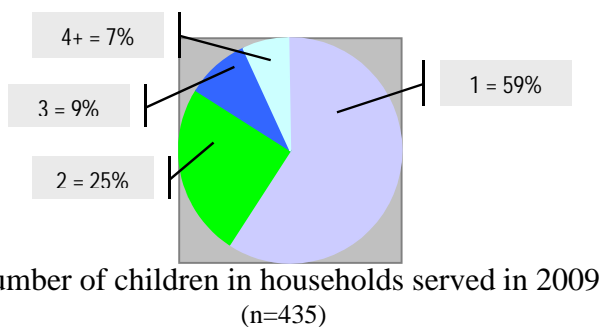
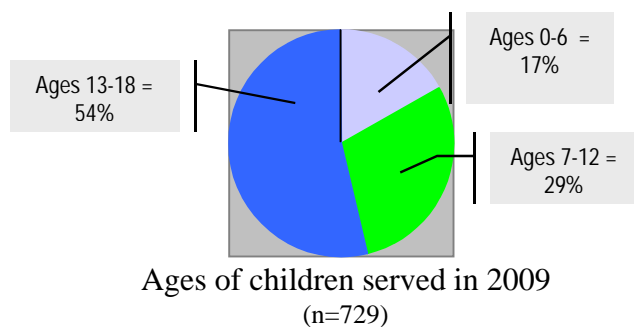
An increase of \$865,000 in District funding with the start of Fiscal Year 2010 allowed for program capacity to improve from 510 to 610 children. During 2009, 729 children received a GCP subsidy.



Average subsidy:
\$744.91
per month
per child



- Began year with waiting list of 114 applicants on behalf of 168 children.
- Ended year with waiting list of 44 families applying on behalf of 70 children.




■ Number of Families Served in 2009
By Ward

1. Introduction

This is the fourth annual report about the Grandparent Caregivers Program (GCP), which the District established under the Grandparent Caregivers Pilot Program Establishment Act of 2005. The Budget Support Act of 2009 modified the program out of pilot status, creating the Grandparent Caregivers Program and ensuring the perpetuity of the program. The Establishment Act requires an annual report that includes a specific set of statistics (Table 1) and recommendations for program improvement (Section 3). The District launched the program in March 2006, with the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) serving as program administrator.

Table 1: GCP Statistics

	CY 2007	CY 2008	CY 2009
Program funding (subsidy portion)	\$4.3 million	\$4.3 million	\$4.5M - \$5.365M
Applications received (from families)	146	113	67
Subsidies awarded (to children)	140	82	203
Children receiving both GCP and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (at EOY)	359	381	449
Denials due to ineligibility	6	8	17
Denials due to funding (applications on the waiting list as of End of Year)	62	115	44
Estimated eligible caretakers who have not yet applied	See discussion, page 4		
Subsidies terminated by program or caregiver	70	77	95
Substantiated instances of fraud	0	0	0
Children removed from household while receiving subsidy	1	3	5

2. Program Achievements

Transitioned to a Permanent Program with Increased Subsidy Budget

The passage of the 2009 Budget Support Act was a very exciting milestone. Included with that legislation was language creating the Grandparent Caregivers Program – a permanent incarnation of the previous Grandparent Caregivers Pilot Program. The change does not modify any of the substantive aspects of the program, which have been crafted to suit program needs over the last three years.



The FY10 budget also included a substantial boost to the GCP's subsidy funds. An additional \$865,000 will provide subsidies for nearly one hundred more children each year. This increase in our capacity reduced our waiting list from 114 families to just 44 families. It also reduced our wait time for services from about eighteen months to about eight months.

Annual Rate Adjustment

The Safe and Stable Homes Act of 2007 made several changes to the Grandparent Caregivers Program. One such change was to the mandate that GCP rates must mirror CFSA's permanent guardianship rates. Now, GCP rates shall remain within 5% of CFSA's permanent guardianship rates. This flexibility was crucial this year in allowing the program to provide its clients with a modest subsidy increase without unduly sacrificing program capacity.

End of Life Planning

As recommended in last year's annual report, the GCP launched an End of Life Planning program this year. A 2008 survey of grandparent caregivers revealed that a high percentage did not have solid end of life plans, particularly for the children in their care. In early 2009, GCP staff met with various community partners to lay the groundwork for this complex and voluminous project. The GCP distributed a survey among our clients gauging their interest and level of intricacy involved in their household. From there, the GCP partnered with AARP's Legal Counsel for the Elderly, the Neighborhood Legal Services Program and the law clinic at Catholic University's School of Law. The 195 GCP clients who expressed interest in this service were referred to these pro bono legal providers based on their needs and complexities. The legal providers also acted as a team providing insight and advice to troubleshoot issues as they arose. As new clients sign their subsidy agreements, this program is offered to them and they are linked to a provider for this free legal service.

Modification of Background Check Process



All applicants to the GCP, and any adult household members, are required to complete a background check process including local police clearances, fingerprints and a child protection registry check. At the program's inception, applicants obtained fingerprinting cards from the GCP office and traveled to Metropolitan Police Department's headquarters to complete the procedure, which also required an out-of-pocket fee be paid for the local check. This year, the GCP, with the cooperation of MPD and CFSA, streamlined the process for our applicants. GCP clients are now permitted to use the LiveScan fingerprinting machine housed at CFSA headquarters. Therefore, our applicants need only make an appointment with GCP staff for their fingerprinting, alleviating

waits and confusion. Many choose to also use this time for review of their application by GCP staff to ensure completeness. Using in-house services has also allowed us to waive any out-of-pocket fees associated with the clearances. We have a notary on staff who assists clients in completing their child protection registry check forms, as well. This process is also used for our clients requiring recertification. GCP regulations require that the clearance process be completed every two years.

Transfer to Family Resources Division

October was a month of transitions – not only to becoming a permanent program but also within CFSA. The Grandparent Caregivers Program was transferred to CFSA’s Family Resources Division. This area of the agency monitors all subsidy programs and has already proven to be a wonderful resource as the GCP continues to improve for the benefit of our clients.

Coordination with Community Groups

GCP continues its strong ties with community advocates and stakeholders. We maintain valuable working relationships with organizations such as AARP, Bread for the City, Children’s Law Center, Family Ties, Generations United, Legal Aid Society, and the legal clinics at Catholic University and University of the District of Columbia law schools. In doing so, communication remains open including periodic program update emails.

3. Statistical Overview

Applications

Program applications can be obtained by prospective applicants in several ways. Many call the program office for a copy to be mailed, while others appear personally to pick one up. The application is also available on the CFSA website (www.cfsa.dc.gov) for download and has been disseminated among the program's many community partners. In 2009, GCP received 67 applications from families new to the program who were applying on behalf of 114 children. Additionally, six existing program participants submitted applications to add eight children who came into their care or otherwise became eligible after the family began receiving a subsidy.

Subsidies

Caregivers signed subsidy agreements every month in 2009, based on availability. We approved a staggering 203 new subsidies, counted per child, substantially relieving our waiting list. Table 2 shows the number of subsidies approved each month.

**Table 2:
New Children Enrolled by Month, 2009**

Jan.	3	Apr.	12	July	13	Oct.	96
Feb.	1	May	14	Aug.	11	Nov.	4
Mar.	2	June	11	Sept.	30	Dec.	6

The GCP had a waiting list during this entire calendar year and maintained capacity at all times. Capacity did, though, fluctuate with a significant increase in our subsidy budget beginning on October 1st. The GCP

began the year with a capacity of 510 but ended the year with a capacity of about 610. Overall, 729 children, residing with 435 families, received subsidies for all or part of 2009.

Once approved, a caregiver can expect to receive an average daily rate of \$24.83—or \$744.91 for a 30-day month per child. The average annual subsidy amount per child is \$9,062.95.

Waiting List (No Denials Due to Funding)

When the program reached capacity in August 2007, we established a waiting list. Thus, we did not deny any applications due to funding but rather added applicants to the program from the waiting list. These applicants sign their subsidy agreements and start the program the day a vacancy is created by another participant. At the beginning of 2009, the waiting list contained 114 families who had applied on behalf of 168 children. An active year, complemented with a significant budgetary boost in FY10, allowed the GCP to make significant progress with the waiting list. As of December 31, 2009, 46 families caring for 72 children were on the waiting list awaiting a vacancy. Our wait time has also been decreased from a high of eighteen months to about eight months.

We place new applicants on the waiting list upon receipt of their complete application (not including return of Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and Child Protection Registry clearances). Because we sometimes receive multiple applications a day, we note the date and time of receipt on each new application to establish a queue.

Estimated Eligible Caretakers



GCP continues to rely on 2005 census data, which is the latest available, showing that 5,764 District children live in grandparent-led households.

However, we have no way of estimating how many of those households are below 200 percent of the Federal poverty level, as required for GCP eligibility.

In addition, almost 20,000 District children (17%) live in *relative-led* households. This information from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey shows a growing trend that reflects the important role grandparent and kinship caregivers play in the lives of children in our city. The average number of children per family participating in the program is less than two, specifically 1.67, and the average age of the children currently in the program is 12 years.

GCP Participants Receiving TANF

Of the 729 children who received a GCP subsidy during 2009, a total of 539 (74%) also received TANF. An additional 82 children (11%) received Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Per the Grandparent Caregivers Pilot Program Establishment Act of 2005, we offset GCP subsidy amounts for these two groups of children by the amount they receive in TANF or SSI. Children that receive Social Security survivorship benefits from a deceased parent receive a full GCP subsidy.

Denials Due to Ineligibility

In 2009, denials due to ineligibility experienced an increase over past years to a total of twenty-five applications. Six of those were applications that were submitted incomplete and the deficiencies were never remedied. When an applicant submits an incomplete application, we send a letter listing what is missing and stating that the applicant has 30 days to provide supplemental information or risk denial. GCP staff generally follows up with a courtesy call, as well.

Four applicants were already receiving another subsidy from CFSA, either guardianship or kinship care. They were, therefore, not eligible for GCP services. The remaining applications were denied because: (a) the child had left the applicant's home (five families), (b) the child was not biologically related to the applicant (one family), and (c) the birth parent was living in the home and the family was over income (one family).

The twenty-five denials include eight applicants who were on the waiting list and denied before their subsidies were approved. In two cases, the caregivers passed away while the family was on the waiting list. The children were transferred to the care of people who did not independently qualify for the GCP. In another case, the child moved out of the home while on the waiting list and, in yet another case, the child turned 18 while on the waiting list. Finally, the GCP was unable to locate four families when they reached the top of the waiting list. Our repeated attempts to reach the applicant by telephone and mail, over the course of multiple months, were unsuccessful and we had no choice but to deny the application and give the spot to the next family.

We continue to ensure that each applicant and adult household member completes our clearance process. This includes FBI fingerprint checks, Metropolitan Police Department records and Child Protection Registry screenings. Although we have asked some applicants to provide

further information to confirm that a child is not at risk, no application has been denied based on the results of this process. Additionally, no applicant who has been denied by the GCP has ever requested a Fair Hearing to litigate the denial.

Terminations

Termination statistics are based on individual children, as the circumstances of one child may change and result in termination without affecting other children in the family.

Of the 95 children who left the program during 2009, a total of 55 became ineligible upon reaching age 18. This was the primary reason for terminating participants. Other reasons included:

- Death of caregiver (eleven children in seven families).
- Another person assumed care of the children (fourteen children).
- Caregivers failed to recertify (eight families).
- Child removed by CPS (five children in four families).
- The caregiver's income increased, exceeding eligibility requirements (two children).

In 2009, no participant elected to challenge a termination decision via a Fair Hearing.

Children Removed from Household While Receiving the Subsidy

In 2009, five children were removed from four grandparents by Child Protective Services while receiving the subsidy. All removals resulted in court neglect cases and CFSA has put numerous services into the homes to assist with reunification. Even with these unfortunate situations, the removal rate for GCP participants is just over half a percent.

4. Recommendations for Program Improvement



The Grandparent Caregivers Program (GCP) has embarked on an exciting new era as it has left its pilot phase behind. We remain very proud of the program's achievements and strongly believe that the distributed subsidies are a critical support to this population of caregivers. The following recommendations intend to enhance the program for each of our participants.

Addition of a Social Worker to the GCP Staff

The Grandparent Caregivers Program's regulations authorize a home visit where concerns exist that an applicant is misrepresenting himself or herself regarding GCP eligibility. The GCP plans to add a part-time social worker to its staff in early 2010 to execute this role. But, it is anticipated that these home visits and other safety checks will only be a portion of the staff social worker's responsibility. We also expect this new staff person to coordinate the creation of a clearinghouse of social services targeted toward our client population. Finally, it is a GCP goal to ramp up an in-house support group for participants, led by this new program social worker. The cost of this new resource will be supported by the program's existing administrative budget.

Programs and Forums

In November, 2009, qualifying GCP clients were treated to a wonderful program coordinated by AARP's Legal Counsel for the Elderly. The event, hosted at the offices of a downtown law firm, featured expert speakers in the areas of wills, powers of attorney, public benefits and landlord/tenant law issues. It was a rousing success and one we hope to replicate several times in 2010. The GCP is planning to implement programs for our participants at least every two months to engage in fellowship and learning in various arenas. GCP staff is also working to secure corporate sponsorship to host a summer picnic for all GCP participants and the children in their households.

Direct Deposit

Currently, subsidy checks are printed and mailed by the D.C. Treasury and are sent to the home mailing address of GCP clients. Because this approach is sometimes unreliable, CFSA is currently exploring the implementation of direct deposit of subsidy funds. No subsidy funds from CFSA are currently transferred via direct deposit and the GCP hopes to be the test population used to ramp up this service during FY 2010.